

Proof sets took 2-year hiatus 'during the '60s

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and currency.

Q—We wanted to buy my son a proof set produced in 1965, his birth year. But the coin dealer we called said he could sell us a \$4 "special mint set," not a proof set. What's the difference, and is \$4 a fair price?—T.O., Berwyn

A—Uncle Sam issued no proof coins from 1965 to 1967, in part because of a shortage of circulating "hard money" caused by the switch to non-silver dimes and quarters. Officials used their equipment to make coins for commerce.

To placate collectors, mint personnel did turn out 2.36 million sets containing uncirculated [non-proof] coins, dubbing them "special mint sets." The retail price you quote is typical.

Q—How can I test a coin to determine whether it's made with gold?—F.K., Chicago

A—The best method is to measure the coin's specific gravity by using a test that can be performed by many high school science students. Then compare the results with the specific gravity of genuine gold coins by checking figures that are published in reference books. Incidentally, the test won't damage your coin.

Q—Are 1968S, 1969S or 1970S nickels worth anything? Those are the only "S" nickels I can find in my change.—G.S., South Bend, Ind.

A—Just 5 cents each. The San Francisco mint produced huge quantities of nickels in each of those three years, with most of the coins circulating along the West Coast. Since 1971, all S-mint nickels have gone into proof sets.

Q—Would you recommend a good book on paper money that I could give as a Christmas gift?—T.M., Plainfield

A—An excellent reference is the 212-page "Standard Catalog of United States Paper Money" by Chester L. Krause and Robert F. Lemke. The soft-back edition includes explanatory material, plus the "retail value" of all bills issued by the Federal Government since the Civil War. To order, send \$14.50 to Krause Publications, 700 E. State St., Iola, Wis. 54990.

Q—I have a shiny silver dollar from 1925 with a misspelling; the word "Trust" in "In God We Trust" is "Trvst." Is the error a major rarity?—A.R., Schaumburg

A—No; your coin is normal because the "u" in "Trust" appears as a "v" on all dollars in the so-called "Peace series" minted between 1921 and 1935. The switch is a throwback to Roman times when people interchanged the two letters. Incidentally, uncirculated 1925 dollars sell for \$35 and up, depending on the sharpness of the strike and other factors.